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Beyond the Headlines: Examining the College Experiences of Division I High-Profile Athletes

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Today's Critics Claim

- ♦ "Big-Man on Campus" continues
- ♦ Academic preparation deficiencies
- ♦ Waived admissions standards
- ♦ Sub-par classroom performance
- ♦ Commercialization and financial rewards
- ♦ NCAA violations and scandals
- ♦ Constant media coverage

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Notable recent critics

- ♦ Shulman and Bowen, 2001; Bowen and Levin, 2003
 - ♦ Elite and selective DIII institutions
 - ♦ Academic deficiencies as compared to non-athlete peers
 - ♦ Receive lower grades
 - ♦ However graduate at consistent rates
 - ♦ Acknowledge challenges faced by DI or big-time sports programs may differ

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Cognitive development

- ♦ Pascarella, 1995; Pascarella, 1999
 - ♦ More diverse institutions
 - ♦ Males in revenue sports showed fewer gains in writing, reading, critical thinking skills
 - ♦ Males in non-revenue sports similar cognitive development to non-athletes
 - ♦ Females on average have similar cognitive development

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Student engagement

- ♦ Umbach, 2005; Umbach, in press;
 - ♦ Male/female athletes similar to non-athletes
 - ♦ Academic challenge
 - ♦ Faculty interaction
 - ♦ Active and collaborative learning
 - ♦ Support from campus environment
 - ♦ Differences across NCAA division
 - ♦ DI males less active and collaborative learning than DIII, DI females less than DII and DIII
 - ♦ DIII athletes report more campus support

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Purpose for Study

- ♦ Address gaps and further previous research efforts
- ♦ Extend previous research through
 - ♦ Use of a national sample
 - ♦ Identification of individual sports of participants
 - ♦ Inclusion of female athletes

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High-Profile Student-Athletes

- ♦ "Revenue-Generating" vs. "High-Profile"
- ♦ Qualifying as "High-Profile"
 - ♦ Degree of broadcast media coverage
 - ♦ Nature of recruitment process
 - ♦ Existence of lucrative professional opportunities
- ♦ **Football** and men's and women's **basketball** student-athletes exist in a "fish-bowl" more than any other intercollegiate sport

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Research Question

- ♦ Do high-profile student-athletes differ from their non-athlete peers across the following three areas?
 - ♦ Engagement in activities (e.g., interactions with faculty) associated with positive educational outcomes
 - ♦ Positive perceptions of the campus environment
 - ♦ Self-reported gains with learning and intellectual development

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Data Source & Sample



- ♦ 2004 and 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- ♦ 67,000 randomly-sampled **first-year** respondents from 195 NCAA Division I institutions
- ♦ Characteristics: 64% female; 12% minority; 97% full-time
- ♦ 6% compete in an NCAA championship sport
- ♦ 540 and 119 high-profile male and female student-athletes

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Measures: Dependent Variables

- ♦ Engagement Scales
 - ♦ Level of Academic Challenge ($\alpha = .73$)
 - ♦ Active & Collaborative Learning ($\alpha = .63$)
 - ♦ Student-Faculty Interaction ($\alpha = .71$)
- ♦ Perceptions of the Campus Environment Scales
 - ♦ Supportive Campus Environment ($\alpha = .73$)
 - ♦ Satisfaction with College Experience ($\alpha = .74$)
- ♦ Self-reported Gains Scales
 - ♦ Personal and Social Development ($\alpha = .86$)
 - ♦ General Education ($\alpha = .82$)
 - ♦ Practical Competence ($\alpha = .76$)

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Measures: Control Variables

- ♦ Ethnicity
- ♦ First-generation college student
- ♦ Non-traditional aged student (>24 years)
- ♦ Full-time enrollment
- ♦ Greek (social fraternity or sorority)
- ♦ Living on or near campus
- ♦ Transfer
- ♦ Expected (or declared) academic major

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Analytical Approach

- ♦ OLS regression models for males and females (before & after controls)
- ♦ Dummy variables for high-profile and non-high-profile athletes created; non-athletes used as reference group
- ♦ Standardized dependent variables
 - ♦ Unstandardized regression coefficients equal effect size: help estimate the standard deviation difference between high-profile athletes and non-athletes

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Effect sizes comparing first-year high-profile student-athletes to non-athletes (with controls)

	Male		Female	
	β	sig.	β	sig.
Engagement in Effective Educational Practices				
Academic Challenge	.155	***	-.166	+
Active and Collaborative Learning	.262	***	.082	
Student-Faculty Interaction	.323	***	.151	+
Perceptions of Campus Environment				
Supportive Campus Environment	.101	*	.305	***
Satisfaction	-.191	***	-.033	
Self-Reported Gains				
Personal Gains	.223	***	.143	
Educational Gains	.098	*	.226	*
Practical Gains	.139	**	.241	**

+ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Limitations

- ♦ Small "N" for female high-profile athletes
- ♦ Limited number of statistical controls
 - ♦ Academic motivation
 - ♦ Pre-college ability
- ♦ Multi-level model not used

Discussion and Implications

- ♦ Support that the experiences of high-profile student athletes on-average are comparable to non-athletes
- ♦ Evidence supports multi-faceted nature of the student-athlete experience
 - ♦ Grades, graduation rates, cognitive gains, activities and effort expended
- ♦ Timely research given rising media coverage and critic calls for athletic reform

Discussion and Implications

- ♦ Increased assessment efforts needed to ensure experiences of all athletes are considered
- ♦ Male high-profile athlete satisfaction warrants further consideration
- ♦ Results suggest benefits/challenges of athletic participation not same for men and women
- ♦ Further research on the benefits and success stories that come from athletic participation

Questions & Discussion